Remarks to the Medal-Winning Teams of the National Science Olympiad

March 27, 1992

Everybody please be seated, and welcome, welcome. Well, I'm glad our previous meeting didn't run late, or I'd have had to bring a note from Barbara. [*Laughter*] But it is so great to see all of you and to be here with two of our very, very best: Secretary Watkins, Secretary of Energy, also has this compelling and overriding interest in things educational; and also Lamar Alexander, our Secretary of Education, who is leading from that Department for what we call America 2000, that I'll touch on in a minute. I'd like to greet the two up here also, Mr. Cairns and Mr. Putz, our leaders, your leaders, and thank them for their vision and for all they're doing. Their successful State competition has really inspired the Olympiad program. And most of all, though, let me welcome all of you, the very special young men and women here representing the 10,000 schools and the 1.5 million students who take part in the special Olympiad. Congratulations on your victory in America's olympics of the mind.

I know a lot of you are not only looking back with pride on last year's victory, but you're looking ahead to May 16th at Auburn, especially the teams from Grandville and Jenison Junior Highs. And you should be up for awards in the juggling event, too, because the way you can be in Washington with me today and then home in Michigan at your State olympics competition tomorrow is pretty good.

I am tremendously impressed by all of the students and, of course, all the teachers and by the incredible scope of activities in which you participate. You're really like decathlon athletes, good at so many varied skills like problem solving and test taking, device building.

I've looked over some of the things you've had to do to win in the Olympiad, and I'd never be able to build a musical instrument out of nonmusical materials or identify the age of reptiles. Mesozoic, I'm told is the correct one there for you amateur paleontologists. That's also around the time that dinosaurs started eating broccoli, your history books will tell you. [*Laughter*] I don't want to get off of this subject, but did you notice the other day they said broccoli is good for your health? I've felt it was a medicine all along. [*Laughter*]

So anyway, you've worked all year to get where you are, competing in 32 individual and team events in subjects like biology and chemistry, physics, Earth science, and computers.

You know, I might just be able to compete after all. Last year, at the urging, the insistence of Secretary Alexander, who is a very persistent fellow, I started to learn how to work a computer. And it's taken me a while, but a couple of months ago I wrote my first program. I called it "Michelangelo." [*Laughter*] And I wonder—I'm never quite sure what ever happened to it. [*Laughter*]

No, but seriously, you know, Lamar makes the point that nobody is too old to learn. And so he said, "You've got to do something." So I know I could learn from everybody in this room about it, but I'm really enjoying it, sending out memos and trying to master what you all know so much about. You're more than smart, and you're more than hard-working teams, I've heard. You're the best ambassadors that this country has. You show who we can be and what we can do if we just put our minds and our great American genius to work. And I am proud to honor you today because your Nation is proud to claim you, proud to recognize your achievement.

You've shown the kind of excellence that will help us meet the ambitious goals that we've set for our Nation in this America 2000 education strategy that I mentioned. We know we've got to be competitive all across the board, but we especially have to be competitive in math and science in this changing world. Our economic health, our economic survival depend on how we educate ourselves to face the challenges out there. We've called on our kids to be

number one in the world in math and science by the turn of the century. And you are visible proof that we can do it.

I'm sure you've heard the results of the most recent science study of American students. And those scores simply reinforce the fact that science must be made a priority. We're serious about science and math. We've requested over $2 billion in Federal spending on math and science education in next year's budget. If my math is correct, and with this crowd out here it had better be, that's an increase of 123 percent in the last 3 years.

We also want to bring new technology into the classroom so kids can interact with astronauts and explorers and scientists, so rural schools can have access to state-of-the-art resources, and so all American kids can be exposed to the cutting-edge technologies and ideas that will shape their future.

Each one of you has learned for yourselves the true meaning of math and science. Before the numbers and the charts and tables, there is the question and the quest. And we've got to harness that same spirit of innovation, that same sense of discovery to reinvent American education, to turn our backs on the status quo, break the mold, and build a new generation of American schools. We've got to create new incentives for excellence like school choice, by giving parents the power to choose which schools serve their children best, public, private, religious.

And if we're really serious about excellence in education, we've got to recognize that renaissance begins with revolution. Real excellence demands commitment, not just from government but from everyone in every community, as we move this Nation towards achieving those six national education goals. It demands talented men and women giving their time to become tutors, mentors, and classroom assistants. I call them Points of Light. It demands businesses, churches and synagogues, civic groups forming partnerships to support local schools, working together towards what we call America 2000 communities, places where education doesn't just happen in the classroom, places where education means lifelong learning. Together, we really will reinvent the American school, community by community, neighborhood by neighborhood, all across the United States.

The Science Olympiad program shows us the way, lights the way. It brings together 3,000 volunteers, teachers, parents, business people, each one working to strengthen excellence in his or her own community. Folks like the neighbors of Pierce School, who ran car washes, sold candy, collected contributions to raise $12,000 so their team could go to the nationals. I hear even the fourth graders in the nearby Exton School raised $10, and when you're trying to get by on an allowance, $10 is a small fortune.

And you're all here today because of volunteers like these across this country. And you're here because you're not afraid to reach out for excellence. And that's why I was determined to come over here to salute you. We think of the scientist who one day will discover the cure for cancer, find the formula to guarantee against AIDS, or use technology to wipe out hunger. And we realize that today that man or woman is a student in a science class somewhere. Maybe it's a kid who will catch a spark from this program, a spark that will change his life, her life, and in the process literally change the world. The Science Olympiad has that kind of power.

So, congratulations on your achievements, on bringing to academic competition the pride and enthusiasm usually known in sports contests, and on making learning exciting. So good luck in everything you do. And when one of you kids can prove who started the Michelangelo virus, just remember: My name is Dana Carvey. [*Laughter*].

Now, thank you all for coming.

Note: The President spoke at 12:50 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to John Cairns, science supervisor, Delaware Department of Public Instruction; Gerard J. Putz, science consultant, Macomb Intermediate School District, Macomb County, MI; and comedian Dana Carvey.